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In the Amazon rainforest, Looking for Magnolia trees

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Ecuador is located in the American Tropics, crossing the middle of the world at latitude 0° 0' 0", and it is home to a hotspot of biodiversity for land plants, with *Magnolia* trees towering over most of the habitats present in the country. Until 2010, only four *Magnolia* species were known in Ecuador, and questions about their species diversity remained. In that year, the Prometeo Project, sponsored by the Ecuadorian government, created a unique opportunity to bring together botanists to study the country's biodiversity. During that time, Antonio Vázquez, David Neill, Frank Arroyo, and Álvaro Pérez led field expeditions and conducted herbarium revisions across Ecuador to study the taxonomy of the Magnoliaceae family. This incredible fieldwork resulted in taxonomic studies that discovered 19 additional species, for a total of 23 species by 2021.

Although the new species of Ecuadorian magnolias have been described morphologically, the evolutionary relationships among these species remain unclear. *Magnolia* species are typically distinguished by elliptic, coriaceous

Figure 1. Expedition team from the University of Kentucky, Louisiana State University, and Pontifícia Universidad Católica del Ecuador at the Cordillera del Cóndor.

leaves, petals around six, and apocarpous multifollicular fruits, but this might not be sufficient to distinguish among species, as some traits are shared across taxa. In 2021, we began a project to elucidate these relationships using both morphological traits and DNA sequences for all the *Magnolia* species in Ecuador. To obtain both morphological and DNA information, we traveled extensively across the country to collect specimens, record descriptions, and gather fresh tissue samples essential for genetic analyses.

Cordillera del Cóndor, *Magnolia lozanoi* (Data Deficient – IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature) – February 14 to 22, 2025. (9 days)

In February 2025, we embarked on an expedition to search for *Magnolia* in the Ecuadorian Amazon region thanks to the help of the Magnolia Society. We traveled from Quito, the capital of Ecuador, to Gualaquiza, Morona Santiago, looking for a special magnolia, *Magnolia lozanoi,* in the Quimi Reserve, for which we had very little morphological information and no DNA samples. This reserve is located on the plateau of the Cordillera del Cóndor at 2,000 meters above sea level. We hiked through the cloud forest for six hours just to reach the location and set up camp. Along the walk, we witnessed a transition from cloud forest to a vegetative cover of small trees, without a canopy, along with some swamps (Figure 1).

During a five-day botanical collection, we found several plants that compose these (beautiful) forests, including *Phlegmariurus pruinosus, Burmeistera quimiensis*, and *Magnolia lozanoi*. *Magnolia lozanoi* was first reported by

Figure 2. Reserva Biológica El Quimi at the Cordillera del Cóndor, Ecuador. A) The plateau is at 2000 meters above sea level. The soil is characterized by sandstone. B-C) *M. lozanoi* are trees that reach a height of 4 meters. B) Flower bud and C) mature fruit.

Alwyn. H. Gentry during a rapid evaluation of the reserve in 1993. During this expedition, we found that most individuals had already passed the flowering stage, but a few still had some fruits. Pérez et al. (2020) reported a Basidiomycota fungus on the leaves of this species, and we observed it again during our expedition. *Magnolia lozanoi* is found across the plateau, but it has not yet been reported on the plateau slopes.

Ecuadorian Amazon lowlands, *Magnolia napoensis* (Endangered – IUCN) – February 22 to March 1, 2025. (8 days)

We continued with the expedition to look for *Magnolia napoensis*. We went to Puyo to plan the logistics for visiting the Sarayacu community, a Kichwa indigenous culture located in the Amazon lowlands. The only way to access the Sarayacu community is by traveling three hours downstream from the Sasapi port by canoe. During our visit, we stayed with one of the families in the community— the Dahua family. Although the type specimen is from a different locality, Alex Dahua, one of the community leaders, was extremely knowledgeable and reported that *Magnolia napoensis* also grows in this area. After settling into their home and trying chicha, a drink made from palm fruit, we started our exploration. *Magnolia napoensis* is listed as endangered under the IUCN, and we confirmed the presence of a population at various life stages, ranging from seedlings to large trees with flowers and fruits. After our visit, we also discovered that the Sarayacu community has made incredible efforts to preserve this species, and they use it as one of the key species to support conservation.

Eastern slopes of Ecuadorian Andes, *Magnolia llanganatensis* (Endangered – IUCN) – March 4 to 10, 2025. (7 days).

Our expedition started in the south and moved northward in the Ecuadorian Amazon. In the second part of the expedition, we visited the eastern Andes slopes where *Magnolia llanganatensis* was first collected in 2014. *Magnolia llanganatensis* is found in the Río Zuñac Reserve, which borders Llanganates National Park. This area remains unexplored, and walking through the forest under changing

Figure 3 Visit to the Sarayaku community in the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest. We worked with Alex Dahua, territorial leader of the Sarayaku Kichwa indigenous people.

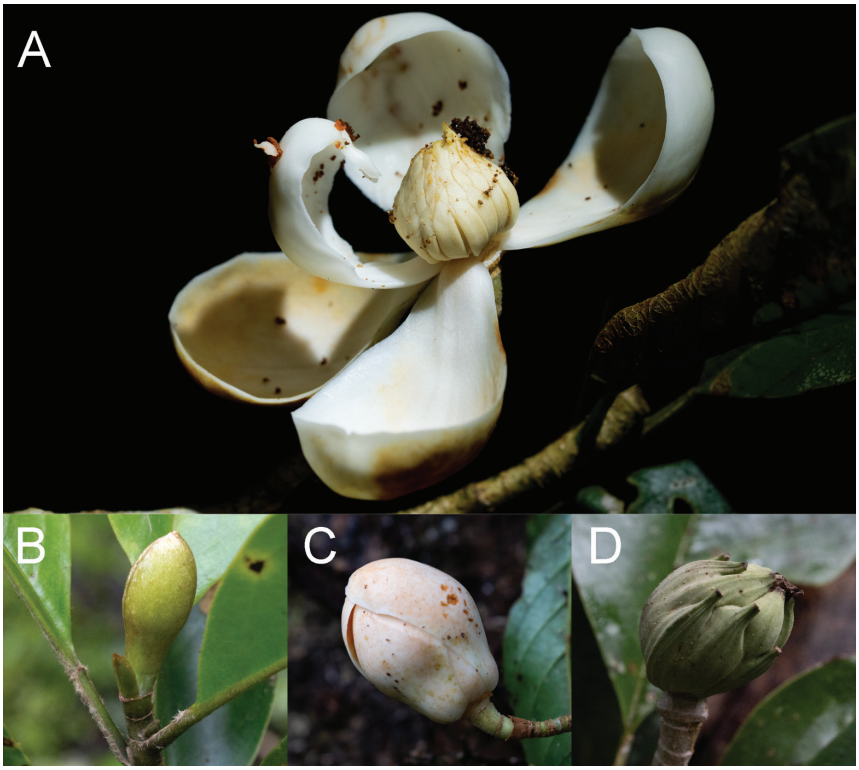

Figure 4 *Magnolia napoensis* population at the Sarayacu indigenous territory. A) The flower opens at night around 9 pm. The flowers are protogynous, meaning the female reproductive stage matures before the male reproductive stage. B) Flower bud. C) Flowers remain closed during the day, sometimes pollinators remain inside the flower until the flower opens at night. D) Immature fruit.

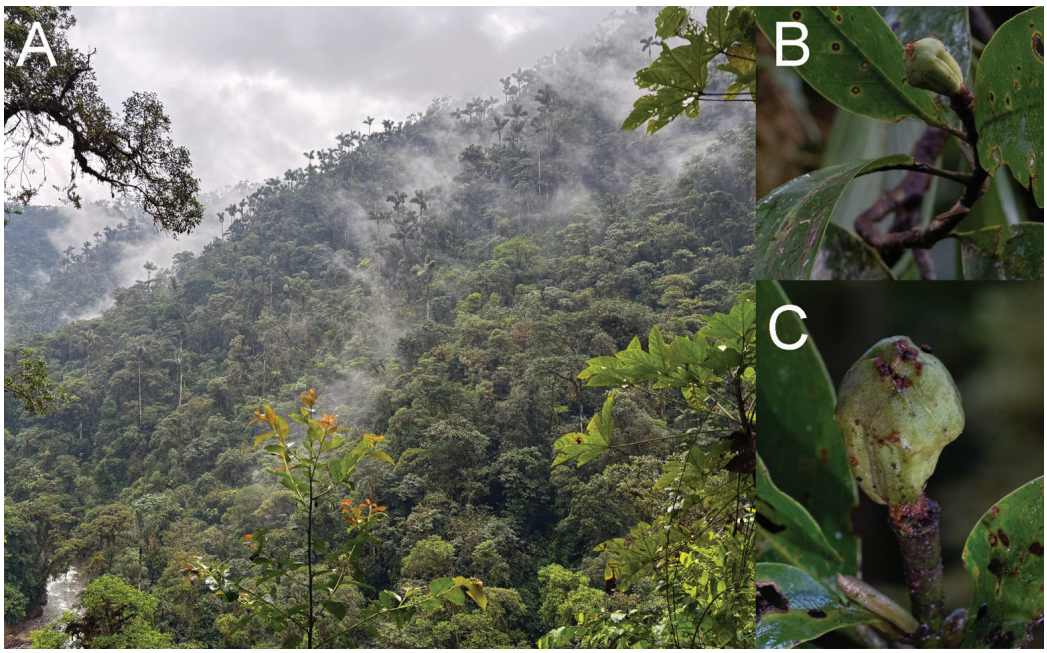

Figure 5 EcoMinga Foundation's Rio Zuñac Reserve. A) Cloud forest on the eastern slopes of the Ecuadorian Andes. B-C) Immature fruits of *M. llanganatensis*. The trees reach a height of 30 meters.

weather conditions made the search challenging. All our previous research indicates that *M. llanganatensis* is only found in this locality, but we think it may occur more broadly along the cloud forest.

Southeastern Ecuadorian Andean Cordillera, *Magnolia tapichalacae* (Critically Endangered)

During our most recent fieldwork, we identified three new morphotypes. One belongs to the section Splendentes and has been described as *Magnolia tapichalacae* Á.J. Pérez & E. Rea, sp. nov. (Figure 6). The other two morphotypes belong to the section Talauma, and we are currently preparing their formal descriptions. Following those findings, the number of species will increase to 27. However, we estimate that the total number could rise to 30 in the coming years, a growth of two new species per year since 2010.

After 100 days of fieldwork and herbarium revisions, we were able to gather samples from nearly all known locations of *Magnolia* species in Ecuador and assessed their population statuses. We have joined forces with many ongoing and important conservation initiatives in Ecuador, such as those led by Fundación Jocotoco and Mashpi Lodge–Fundación Futuro, which focus on germination and propagation of *Magnolia buenaventurensis, M. canandeana, M. chiguila, M. dixonii, M. mashpi*, and *M. mindoensis*. Unfortunately, we were unable to locate *Magnolia neillii*, a species recorded in the Amazonian lowlands. It is classified as Critically Endangered according to the IUCN. *Magnolia neillii* closely resembles *Magnolia equatorialis*, and the last known collection was made in 1987. The species' reported localities have since been impacted by livestock and pasture expansion, putting it at serious risk of extinction. Immediate conservation efforts are needed.

A clear understanding of *Magnolia* diversity, morphology, and genetics in Ecuador lays a foundation for ecology and conservation of this wonderful and long-evolving group of plants. We are currently investigating the evolutionary relationships and biogeographical patterns of Ecuadorian magnolias through an interinstitutional and international collaboration among Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador (PUCE), the University of Kentucky (UK), Auburn University (AU), Mercer University (MU), and the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology (HAIB). Many other scientific ideas have been initiated thanks to all this fieldwork and natural history observations, many of them including Ecuadorian students who are interested in thermogenesis, pollination, karyotypes, population genetics, and genomes of Magnoliaceae species. *Magnolia* species have small, mostly endemic distributions. This highlights the importance of continuing fieldwork and collecting natural history observations for these species. This research is only possible thanks to the great support from the Magnolia Society, Universidad de Guadalajara, PUCE, UK, AU, and HAIB.

Figure 6. *Magnolia tapichalacaensis*, a new species from the Splendentes section. *Magnolia tapichalacae* resembles *M. bankardiorum* and *M. lozanoi*. Its long grayish-white tomentose trichomes distinguish it along the underside of the leaves and hypsophyll.

First report of thermogenesis in an Ecuadorian *Magnolia* species

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In a world of many pollination strategies, the metabolic production of heat is one of the most unusual. Imagine the most incredible runway in which each flower is a model performing for its most important audience: its pollinator. Flowers showcase their diversity through shapes, colors, structures, and captivating scents. In addition to these diverse options, some fascinating flowers stand out for their ability to produce heat, using it as a unique strategy to attract pollinators. This "performance" exemplifies floral thermogenesis, a trait unexpected in plants, since heat production has been a feature traditionally associated with endothermic organisms like mammals and birds. However, it is actually present in 14 plant families worldwide (Peris et al., 2024). Plants use the production of heat to enhance floral scents and to provide an energy reward for their visitors. In some cases, a thermogenic flower becomes a perfect place where insects can find food by eating petals and even mate, making it a phenomenon with a huge ecological impact.

Among recorded thermogenic plants are the Magnoliaceae family, where Magnolia is the only genus to exhibit this feature. Thermogenesis has been reported in two species of Magnolia from the temperate regions of China, and in two tropical forest species from Brazil and Mexico, with notable differences in timing and intensity among each species (Dieringer et al., 1999; Seymour et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2013, 2014). These limited records highlight the need for further research on this remarkable trait in magnolias.

The American tropics are a hotspot of *Magnolia* diversity and endemism, with many species occurring in small localities adapted to specific conditions. In the tropical forests of Ecuador, diversity, endemism, and conservation needs are particularly high. There are 25 species of *Magnolia* native to Ecuador, of which 17 are endemic, and 21 are listed as Vul-

nerable, Endangered, or Critically Endangered (Pérez et al., 2025).

Despite this remarkable diversity and the urgent conservation concerns, little is known about the ecology or metabolic processes of Ecuadorian *Magnolia* species. In fact, no studies of thermogenesis in an Ecuadorian *Magnolia* had been conducted until now. Here, we begin to address this knowledge gap by providing the first documented evidence of thermogenesis in *Magnolia mindoensis* (Figure 1). M. mindoensis is a species endemic to the Chocó biogeographic region of Ecuador and Colombia, occurring in the northwestern slopes of Ecuador and in southern Colombia, specifically in the Nariño department (Vázquez-García et al., 2017).

Our research team from Quito, Ecuador, designed a project to determine whether *M. mindoensis* produces heat, how much heat a flower can generate relative to its environment, and which pollinators it may attract. To achieve this, we actively collaborated with universities, reserves, and local communities that were engaged in *Magnolia* conservation. These collaborations facilitated logistics and gave us the opportunity to engage with the community, farmers, owners of small eco-lodges, and community leaders to share the importance of our *Magnolia* research. Some of the most committed community members even volunteered to help locate suitable trees for monitoring their properties! With support from Mindo Lindo Reserve, the community has been eager to learn more about *Magnolia* conservation, and they are currently working on reforestation projects to enhance biodiversity and encourage eco-tourism (more Mindo Lindo information in the link included in the acknowledgments).

With the support of our collaborators, we conducted three fieldwork sessions during the summer of 2024 and fall of 2025 in the Mindo

Figure 1. *Magnolia mindoensis* in its staminate stage

cloud forest to obtain data on thermogenesis, flowering duration, and insect visitation of *M. mindoensis*. These trees in adult stages can range from 12-40 meters tall (40-130 feet!). The height of these trees makes studying their flowers particularly challenging, so we needed to find trees with relatively low branches. Thanks to the local community this was possible. Trees that persisted on cattle farms without competition allowed us to reach flowers from the ground or with a ladder.

Our methodology included photographic and videographic recordings using a thermal camera and a time-lapse camera, as well as temperature data collection with data loggers. We installed a time-lapse camera near the flowers to understand the duration of flowering for *M. mindoensis*. We observed a 27-hour flowering process that began when the sepals (the outermost petals) opened and progressed through several stages until the following day (Figure 2).

It is well known that magnolias are protogynous, meaning the female (gynoecium) and male (stamens) reproductive parts are in the same flower, but they are active at different times, separated not by space but by time. In this species, we observed that the female phase begins around dusk, with the flower closing completely by midnight. It slowly reopens during the male phase the following morning, remaining fully open until late that evening. Future work will include recording more flowers and additional individuals to gain a more comprehensive understanding of flowering dynamics in this species.

To record the temperature of different flower tissues, we used a HOBO data logger attached to the nearest branch. This device is equipped with four probes made of thick copper wires that measure tissue temperatures over time and record data every 5 minutes. Probes were inserted when the flower was at the bud stage (Figure 2A and 3A), allowing us to monitor temperature changes throughout anthesis. Temperatures were measured in three different tissues: 1) pedicel, 2) receptacle, and 3) petal, with an additional probe suspended in the air to monitor ambient temperature.

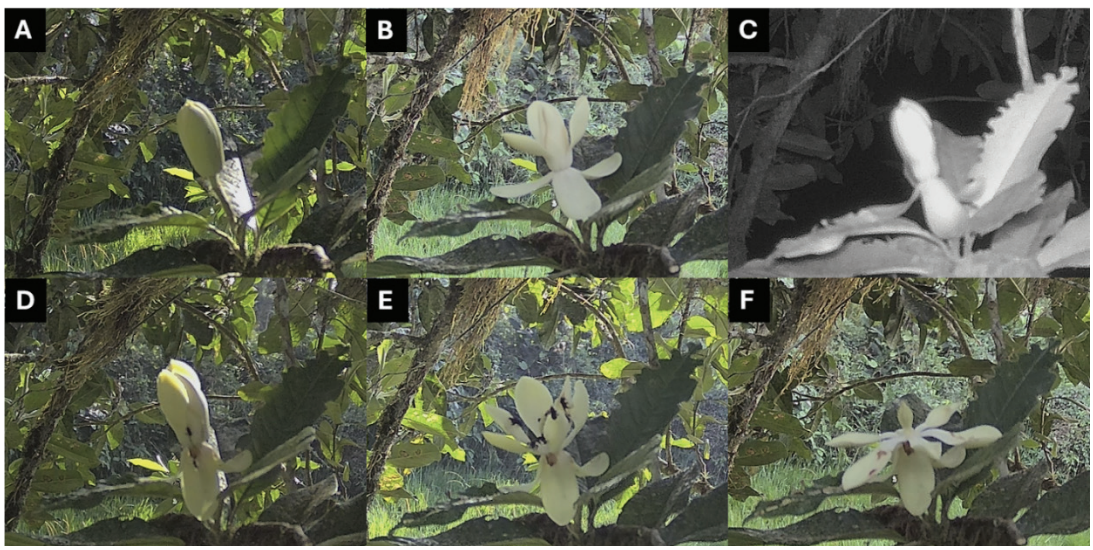

Figure 2. Floral anthesis of *Magnolia mindoensis*

The pedicel served as a control to establish the plant's baseline temperature and to evaluate whether external factors, such as sunlight, affected tissue temperatures. Environmental temperature was used as a reference to compare with the flower's temperature, helping us determine the degree of thermal increase relative to its surroundings. As a result, we confirmed that *M. mindoensis* is a thermogenic species, primarily generating heat in the floral tissues, especially in the receptacle. The temperature could increase by 4-5°C, depending on the floral stage.

We used a thermal camera to photograph the buds (Figure 3C) and flowers (Figure 3D) to document that the species produced heat. However, this method can be affected by external factors, such as solar radiation, which can lead to inaccurate temperature readings.

After analyzing the data from the HOBO data logger, we confirmed that *M. mindoensis* is a thermogenic species, primarily generating heat in the floral tissues, especially in the receptacle. The temperature could increase by 4-5°C, depending on the floral stage. We compared the receptacle temperature to the ambient temperature to create a graph illustrating the extent of temperature increase (Figure 4). Three significant peaks are shown. The first is from the pistillate stage, and the second from the staminate stage, with the pistillate stage

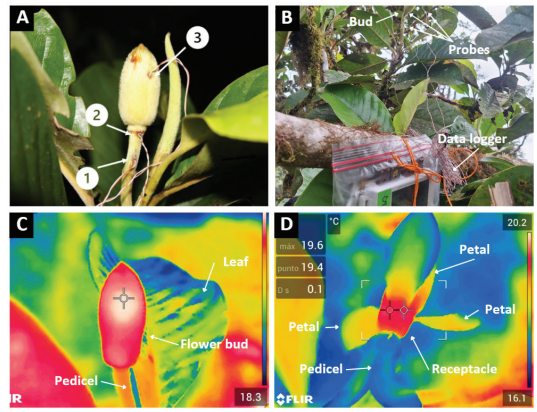

Figure 3: A) Location of probes; B) Data logger on a branch near the flower; C and D) Thermal images.

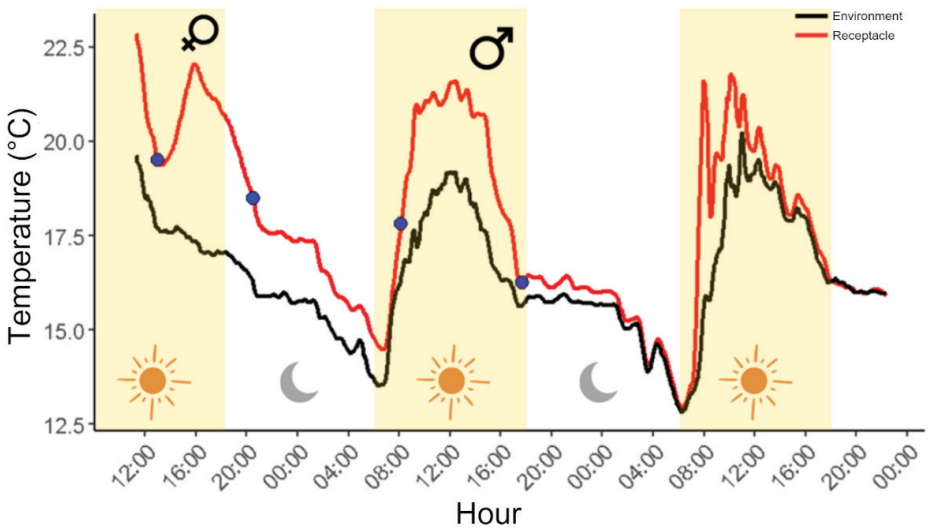

Figure 4. Graph showing temperature peaks during anthesis of a *Magnolia mindoensis* tree. The red line corresponds to the receptacle, and the black corresponds to the environment. The figure illustrates how the receptacle temperature rises in relation to the ambient temperature. Magnolia flowers are protogynous, meaning that the female stage occurs before the male stage.

Figure 5: Pairs of beetles (Scarabaeidae, Rutelinae sp.) mating on *Magnolia mindoensis* flower

producing the greatest increase in temperature. The reason for the third peak remains unclear, as it occurs when the reproductive stages have already passed.

To identify potential pollinators, we stayed until the peak of heat during the pistillate stage. At that point, the *Magnolia* emitted a sweet, appealing scent. As the smell intensified, many beetles gathered around and within the flower, seemingly searching for a mate (Figure 5). Some of the beetles that visit *Magnolia* flowers spend the night consuming petals and pollen, meaning they leave the next day warm, well-fed, and basking in post-coital afterglow, a considerable reward for their pollination services. Unlike most other flowering plants, which trade only food (pollen or nectar) for pollination, magnolias offer an even more generous deal.

In addition to these observations, we collected beetles for later identification and recorded the times they visited the flowers. Based on these data, we aim to develop a dataset of insect visitors and potential pollinators of *M. mindoensis*. We also have additional data to analyze to assess thermogenesis across multiple individuals, and we plan to expand our study to other Ecuadorian *Magnolia* species now that we feel confident in our methodology. We look forward to sharing more results in the future.

In conclusion, this project helped us understand the thermogenic behavior and identify potential pollinators of *M. mindoensis*. This adds to a broader knowledge of *Magnolia* species in the American tropics. Building on this, we can replicate the study with closely related species, such as *Magnolia chiguila* and *Magnolia mashpi*, to provide valuable insights into their evolutionary processes and the differences in thermogenic mechanisms. This study not only confirms the thermogenic nature of *M. mindoensis* but also establishes a robust methodological framework for future research on Ecuador's rich and understudied *Magnolia* flora, paving the way for deeper insights into plant-pollinator coevolution in the Neotropics and informing critical conservation plans.

Acknowledgments:

We sincerely want to thank Pedro Peñafiel and the Mindo and Saloya community for their hospitality and support during the fieldwork. To Galilea Orellana for her support in training on the use of the HOBO equipment and thermal camera. Find more information about the goings on or to plan a visit to Mindo Lindo Reserve here:: http://mindolindo.de/en/nutzungsbedingungen/

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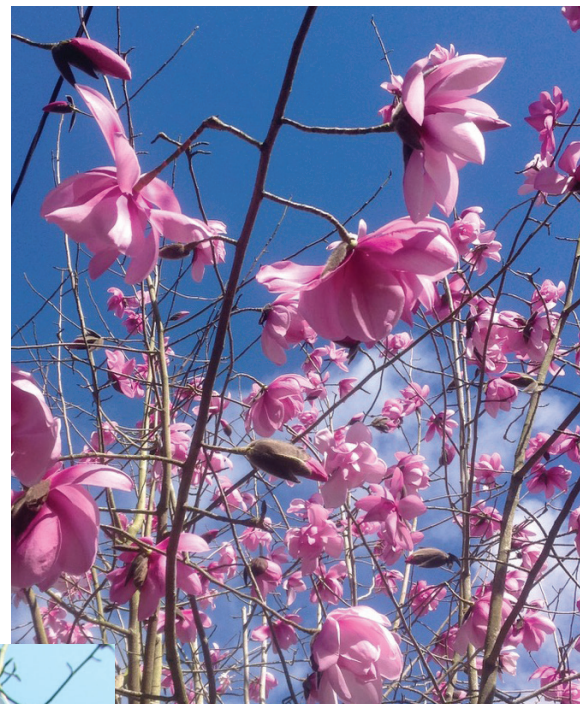
New Cultivar Registrations

Paul Reimer

Magnolia campbellii subsp. *mollicomata* 'Colin'

From Colin Mugridge in the UK, who is a prize winning *Rhododendron* breeder, we have a *M. campbelli* subsp. *mollicomata* selection. This seedling has 10-12 tepals and very large flowers, 12 inches across. The flower colour is RHS red-purple 68C and the flowers mostly hang down because of weight. It flowers mid season. Karan Junker of Junkers Nursery in Taunton rates it very highly and is growing it for commercial sale. It should be available in a few years. https://www.junker.co.uk/



Magnolia 'Gloria' *(M. loebneri* 'Merrill' × *M. stellata* 'Rosea')

This magnolia comes to us from Randy Kobetich of Rehoboth Beach, Deleware, USA. It has a pyramidal shape, pastel pink color with about 30 tepals, and is cold hardy. The variety is named for Randy's mother, and is available at Brotzman's Nursery.

Magnolia virginiana 'Lone Star'

William Forster has selected a vigorous, hardy *M. virginiana* with Texas provenance. It is much different than typical *M. virginiana*. It has large leaves with a white indumentum on the back side of the leaf and has larger flowers and fruits. Will says, "It is a fantastic ornamental, it has been completely deciduous for me and has survived down to -25F. It will also be larger than an average *Magnolia virginiana* with a blooming period from May to October." It is being propagated by Heritage Seedlings & Liners. https://www.heritageseedlings.com/

Magnolia virginiana 'Prolific'

Will Forster is introducing a second *Magnolia virginiana* 'Prolific' so named for its incredibly long bloom period. Will writes, "For me *Magnolia virginiana* 'Prolific' has been a bushy tree with a long bloom period. Here in East Central Illinois (zone 5b) with plenty of moisture I usually get 4-5 months of blooms. The blooms are exquisite with up to 15 tepals and have the typical lemony fragrance one would expect from the species. It is being produced by Heritage Seedlings & Liners. https://www.heritageseedlings.com/

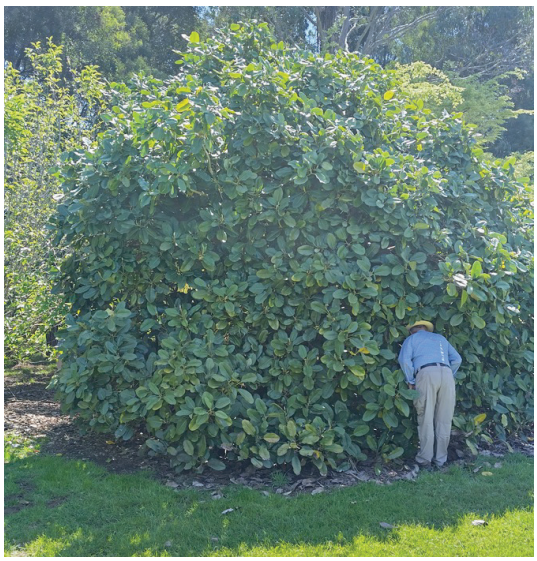
Magnolia 'Pink Mist'

Magnolia 'Pink Mist' is an open pollinated seedling of *M*. 'White Rose' × 'Raspberry Fun' selected by William Forster. *Magnolia* 'Pink Mist' is being propagated by Nick Ternes of Antigo Wisconsin and his website is Botanophilia LLC http://www.iloveshadeplants.com

Magnolia delavayi 'Tassie Blush'

From Tasmania Neil Mitchell has selected a pink flowering *Magnolia delavayi* and named it 'Tassie Blush'. While ivory white is most common with *M delavayi*, occasionally pink flowering ones are found in the wild. This particular selection came from imported seed from Kunming, China by the late David Richmond. This form has tepals that are distinctly pink to pale pink outside and practically white within. Some pink coloration persists at the base of the tepals on the inner surface. The name chosen is a reflection of the color (blush pink outside, white inside) and the origin ("Tazzy" and "Tassie" are both affectionate diminutives for Tasmania).

The cultivar is worthy of naming and introduction to horticulture in Australia because no pink forms of the species are available in this country.



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member Hazel Bodner

The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group

Three groups of plants, one group of enthusiasts worldwide!

If you share a love of rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias, join us! Benefits include a yearbook, regular newsletters, tours, talks and annual seed list.

Visit **www.rhodogroup-rhs.org** for full details

A ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY GROUP

The Maple Society

The international society for maple enthusiasts and experts

From colour in Spring and Autumn, to bark, foliage and flowers through the year, maples are of interest to everyone!

The society provides:

- Quarterly newsletter
- Visits and meetings in the UK and US
- An annual seed distribution scheme
- Triennial symposium

Full details from
http://www.maplesociety.org
secretary@maplesociety.org